

**Eötvös Loránd University**  
**Faculty of Humanities**

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THESES OF DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

**Zsuzsa Kaló**

**COGNITIVE LINGUISTIC DESCRIPTION OF PSYCHOLOGICAL  
AGENCY IN DRUG USERS' NARRATIVES**

**Doctoral School in Linguistics**

Head of School: Dr Bárdosi Vilmos CSc,

**Doctoral School in Hungarian Linguistics**

Head of School: Dr Jenő Kiss, MHAS

**Members of the Evaluation Committee:**

Officially appointed assessors:

Dr habil. Márta Erdős B. PhD

Dr habil Szilárd Tátrai PhD

Secretary of the Committee:

Dr Krisztina Laczkó PhD

Further members:

Dr Éva Andó PhD

Dr Ágnes Domonkosi PhD

Dr Dóra Boronkai PhD

**Supervisors:**

Dr Gábor Tolcsvai Nagy CMHAS

Dr József Rácz DSc

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## **1. Introduction**

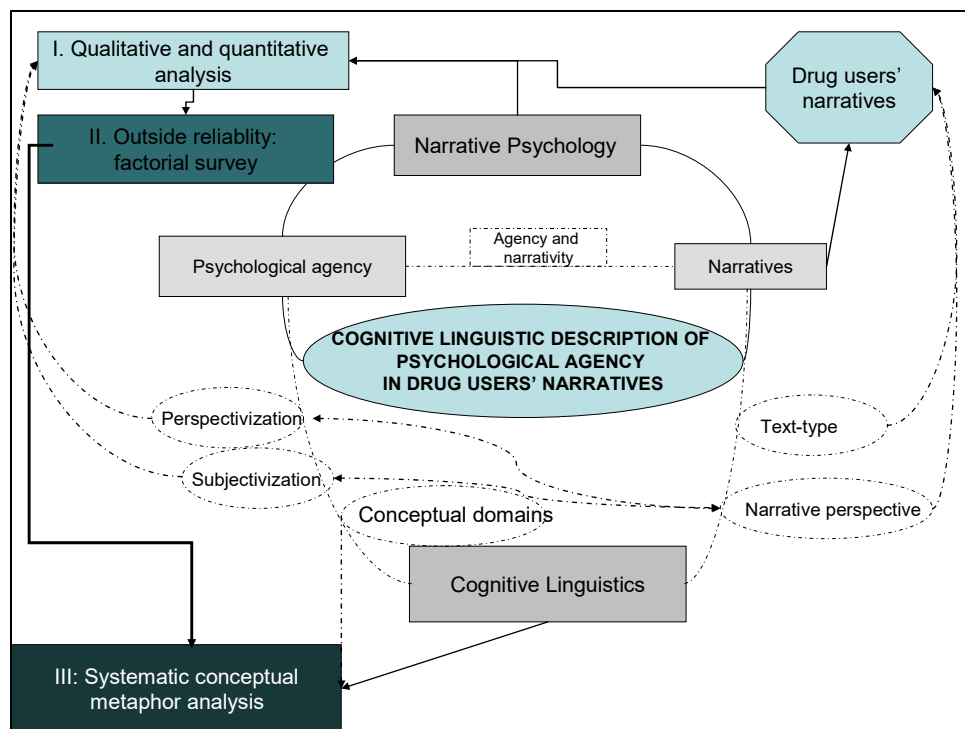
The main aim of the doctoral dissertation is to define psychological agency in cognitive linguistic theoretical frame. I analyze drug takers' narratives with qualitative and quantitative methods, searching for linguistic patterns which can describe a person's agency. I'm looking for the conceptual domains of psychological agency by conceptual metaphor analysis. The cognitive linguistic theoretical frame is available to step over disciplinary borders and by the analysis receive the conceptual frames and linguistic patterns of psychological agency.

The basic theoretical principle of cognitive linguistics is mentalism, which means that our cognition is reflected in our language. This perspective is holistic: it supposes relationship between mind and reality, mind and body, mind and language. The psychological agency is the synonym of self-cognition in the sense of the ways language reflects the speaker's—in our case the drug user—self-evaluation, recognition of different roles, responsibility taking. Other theoretical principle of cognitive linguistics is embodiment (Lakoff & Johnson 1980) which means that our linguistic cognition is determined by physiological and anatomical features. Cognitive linguistics is part of cognitive discipline, has many relations to cognitive disciplines—psychological agency is interesting for both. Aspects of cognitive disciplines dealing with self-awareness and the narrative self are analyzing the relationships among agency, and activity (direct motored acts, moves, moving), cognition and neuro-cognitive explanations of the self—searching for philosophical and neuro-cognitive explanations of human perception and experience.

Definitions of psychological agency is available from neuro-cognitive to personality psychology aspects, agency in linguistics is basically defined by the subjects role (thematic roles) in the sentence. The interdisciplinary aspects of cognitive linguistics make it possible to reveal relations between psychological and linguistic agency terminus and to make mappings between the conceptual domains.

The process of analysis merges current narrative psychological results, cognitive linguistic theories and corpus linguistic methods. I hope that interdisciplinary perspective makes it possible that my results will be a benefit for the Hungarian linguistics and psychology/social studies as well. These disciplines have grounded relationship: social studies are traditionally open to linguistic analysis and solutions', searching for patterns is rooted in qualitative research methodology, in narrative psychological analysis linguistic

methods are often used—the new approach here is the cognitive linguistic aspect as a descriptive tool for narratives and the psychological agency phenomenon.



**Figure 1.**

### **The mental map of the Thesis**

In the Thesis my aim is to give a description of psychological agency

1. from cognitive linguistic perspective
2. to define its markers in Hungarian language
3. to define its conceptual domains.

## 2. Structure of the Thesis

The Thesis consists of a Foreword, two bigger structural part, which is followed by the Discussion and the Summary, in the end the Bibliography and the Appendix (with data tables, investigation materials).

The **Foreword** is a short initial focus of the problem discussed and shows the aims of the thesis.

The **Part A.** shows the theoretical background of the theme with national and international specific literature review.

The A. Part consist of four chapters:

The **1<sup>st</sup> Chapter** is a summary of cognitive linguistic definitions and theories.

The **2<sup>nd</sup> Chapter** is about the terminology *narrative*. I'm looking for the exact definition by showing different methods for analyzing narratives: *the structural*, *the interactional*, *the functional* and *the cognitive approach*. I give a review of investigations, including addicts' narratives.

In the **3<sup>rd</sup> Chapter** I give definition of *psychological agency* by the interactions of psychological and neuro-cognitive theories. I show the different types of narrative psychological investigations and its result concerning psychological agency and addicts' narratives. I give an overview about the possible connections between agency and flow of narratives.

In the **4<sup>th</sup> Chapter** I deal with the conceptions, narrative and psychological agency, in cognitive linguistic theoretical frame, looking for the possibilities of constructing the meaning of psychological agency.

In the end of **Part A.** I summarize the theories shown and set my hypotheses.

The **Part B.** consists of three chapters showing the three empirical investigations.

**Investigation I.** is a *qualitative and quantitative analysis* of drug users' narratives. I show the corpus and its characters, the methods (corpus linguistic and computer assisted text analysis), the computerized tools (in qualitative analysis: Atlas.ti, in quantitative: NooJ), and those linguistic markers (deictic expressions and modality) which is supposed to be the marker of different types of agency in the frame of cognitive linguistic (perspectivization, subjectivization).

**Investigation II.** is a *factorial survey* to check the outside validity of my results.

**Investigation III.** is a *systematic conceptual metaphor analysis* to reveal the conceptual domains and backgrounds of psychological agency. I collect background metaphors from the literature and the Hungarian language Corpus and I interpret these in cognitive linguistic frame.

The **Discussion** Chapter summarizes the results of the three investigations, shows and reflects the possible consequences and the meanings.

The **Summary** Chapter is for showing the theses and the new results for the science, also dealing with open questions.

### **3. Corpus, sample and method**

#### **3.1. Qualitative and quantitative analysis of drug users' narratives**

The corpus that I use for qualitative and quantitative analysis is derived from drug users' narratives, the type of the corpus is constructed from 24 two-member structural monolingual interviews, its topic is life story and drug use. The requirements were to be a coherent speech and that the interviewee should not be intoxicated or showing strong withdrawal symptoms which influence hardly the communication skills. The interviewees' average age was between 21 and 41, the majority was male (16), the patterns of their drug use were characterized by regularity and different drugs at the same time (major drug was heroin), they reported several attempts to stop drug using, in the time of the interview 6 of them were under treatment.

Corpus consists of 322 088 tokens, monolingual vernacular language sample.

##### **3.1.1. Qualitative analysis**

The first part of qualitative analysis was the text analytical description of the corpus. It was followed by a computer-assisted (Atlas.ti) description of the code types of agency in narratives and the analysis of codes by creating code structures and the hierarchy of codes. The linguistic features of the codes were analyzed by open qualitative analysis and plausibility analysis. The aim was to check previous investigations results plausibility on our corpus. The investigation covered the explicit singular first person pronoun (Erdős B. 2006, Berán 2009), the activity-passivity (Békés 2008, Szalai és mtsai 2010, Szalai 2011), the „syntax” (Fowler 1985) and the intentionality (Ferenczhalmy és László 2007)

##### **3.1.2. Quantitative analysis**

Quantitative analysis was done in NooJ program with corpus linguistic tools by creating system of the Hungarian linguistic markers on deictic features and modality (Sanders és Spooren 1997, Tolcsvai Nagy 2011, Tátrai 2011).

#### **3.2. External validity**

Investigation was done to control results' external validity by factorial survey. This method is using vignettes of different fictional, but close to life stories and subjects are judging

different aspects of the stories on a scale or by answering yes or no questions. This method helps to investigate attitudes or latent concepts.

We used 5 different vignettes (stories) of 5 different agency types. In the stories we systematically changed deictic features and modality as our results showed earlier.

The sample consisted of 116 monolingual persons, average age between 16 and 24, mainly females. We collected data in a high school in Budapest (n=52) and at a university in Budapest (n=64).

All of them read and judged 5-5 vignettes, we collected 580 analytic units.

### **3.3. Systematic conceptual metaphor analysis**

Based on the theory of conceptual metaphors (Lakoff and Johnson 1980) with corpus linguistic tools and systematic approach I investigated what kind of conceptual metaphors are of psychological agency, what are the main source- and target domains in Hungarian language. Psychological agency's construal parts are: I, self, self-reflection. As the systematic approach requires, first I collected background metaphors from literature review (Lakoff 1996, Kövecses és Benczes 2010) and different corpuses (own corpus of drug users's narratives and The Hungarian National Corpus, Váradi 2002).

## 4. A Brief Summary of the Analysis and Research Finding

### 4.1. Qualitative and quantitative analysis of drug users' narratives

As a result of the corpus' text analysis I defined the text type as storytelling text, with its features described earlier (Tolcsvai Nagy 2000).

The qualitative analysis of the corpus was guided by the list of agency and lack of agency Codes (based on McAdams 2011, RÁCZ 2006) are: self-mastery, status/victory, responsibility, justification, lack of agency/passivity.

#### 4.1.1. Qualitative analysis

As the result of analysis of Code Structure, the codes relation to each other, we assumed that the core meaning of agency is that the agent speaker has reached something, with some kind of activity, and this action has (not evidently ethically correct or fulfilling society's requirements) a result, the agent is productive; there is difference on intersubjective scale: agent has reached herself, herself is the measure, or the productiveness is measured with other entities; agent is reporting about how and with what kind of tools did she reach that result, and what kind of characteristics are needed for that, e.g. confident; defining reasons for doing that activity, e.g. curiosity; she is also productive in taking responsibility.

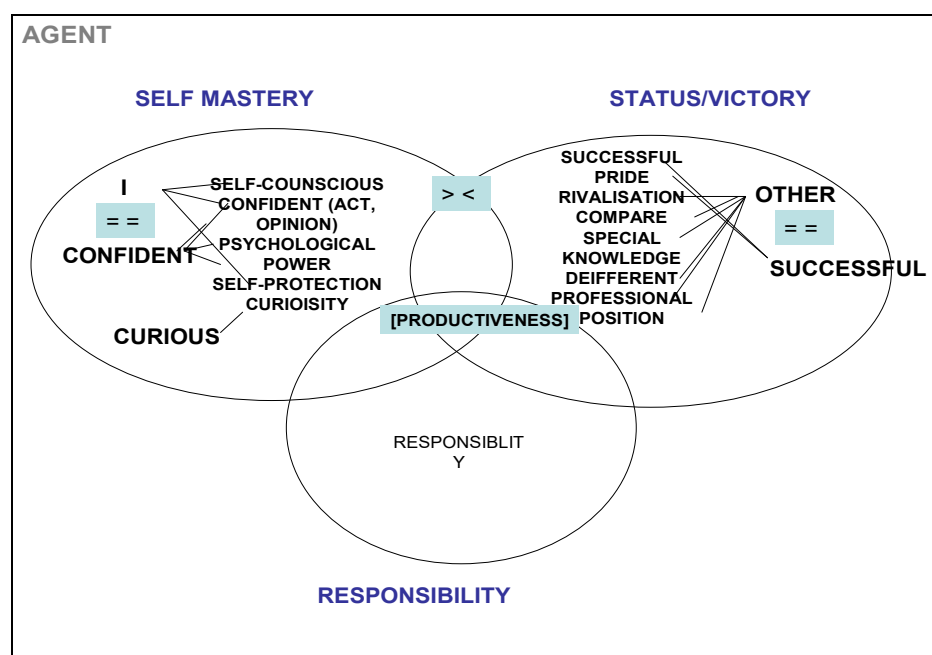
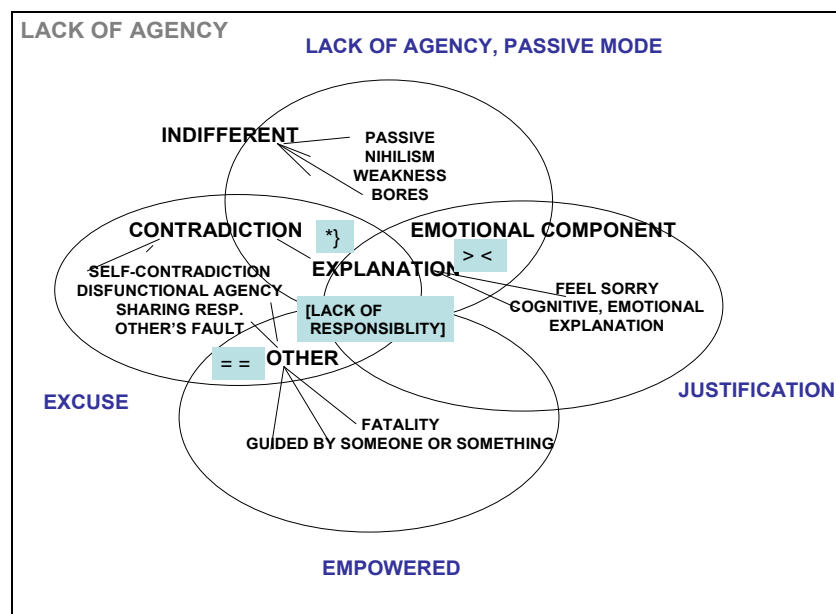


Figure 2.

Code structure of Agency



The lack of agency is the lack of responsibility, which is explained by the speaker with some kind of explanation, which can be logical and coherent or scattered; this explanation can be emotionally defined; its reason can be an attitude, e.g. indifference; the self-field is not showed here, on the intersubjective scale not only human, but surreal entities are represented.



**Figure 2.**

### **Code structure of Lack of Agency**

#### *Open qualitative analysis*

The result of open qualitative analysis shows that the differences between agency and lack of agency can be caught in intersubjectivity, which means whether others are in social cognition. On the time-scale there are differences as well: in self mastery and lack of agency codes there are more references to the present, than in other codes, which are characterized by the storytelling past and past perfect. A few characteristic word usage was found: distinctive was the mental verbs in self mastery codes; in status/victory codes the characterized words (better, best etc.); in empowered code the passive voice.

### *Plausibility-investigation*

From tendencies of Plausibility-investigation we got the result, that agency can be characterized by intentionality and lack of agency with activity-passivity.

#### **4.1.2. Quantitative analysis**

The quantitative results are partly equal (personal and time deictic expressions) qualitative results and pervious studies. Modality characters of psychological agency are new in literature.

#### **4.2. External validity: factorial survey**

As a result of factorial survey there is positive tendency-like relation is between codes of self-mastery, productivity and throwing responsibility to others, and significant relation between the code lack of agency.

#### **4.3. Systematic conceptual metaphor analysis**

The conceptual source domains of agency's conceptual metaphors are DUALITY (and even 'MULTIPLITY') which is relation with the PART-WHOLE metonym. Some parts of psychological agency metaphors are in relation with the source domain CONTAINER.

## **5. Conclusions and theses**

Most important conclusions that can be drawn from this research are: 1. more types of agency can be found in drug users' narratives; 2. agency and the lack of agency aren't antonyms, agency's major concept is productiveness, the lack of agency's major concept is lack of responsibility; 3. psychological agency is in relation with perspectivization and subjectivity; 4. the linguistic construction of psychological agency is in relation with deictic features and modality; 5. the conceptual background of psychological agency is in positive relation with perspectivization and subjectivity by the personal pronoun; 6. the source domains of conceptual metaphor are double, container and whole-part metonymy.

Considering agency it is interdisciplinary—the discourse was further discussed here on the border of cognitive linguistics and narrative psychology; but if we check the neuro-cognitive or the philosophical aspects, neither is absent of other disciplines' influence and effect. Considerably it is because looking for agency's linguistic, formal or mind's correlates, in the end it is the same with the basic declaration: *gnothi seauton* – get to know yourself!

The theoretical impact is in description of psychological agency's linguistic markers in cognitive linguistic frame. Using computer assisted methods, the results can easily be approached and used for other different narratives. Some result may help the description of different narratives. It is a method to compare drug users' and recovery narratives and to create better preventive messages by using better expressions describing the different phenomena.

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